

Disability Benefit Specialist Program

Summary

As part of an eight-county pilot, the Disability Benefit Specialist Program began in the fall of 2000, and currently provides services through Aging and Disability Resource Centers in the following Wisconsin counties: Fond du Lac, Jackson, Kenosha, La Crosse, Marathon, Portage, Richland and Trempealeau. County residents between the ages of 18 and 59 who have a physical and/or developmental disability are eligible for Disability Benefit Specialist services.

Disability Benefit Specialists provide individuals with benefits counseling and support in securing and maintaining public and private benefits and services including SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare and Food Stamps. A Disability Benefit Specialist can also provide referrals and assistance on other matters including low-income tax credits, work incentives, consumer issues, housing, utilities, prescription drug assistance programs, insurance and disability rights. At times, a consumer may also receive representation in formal appeals related to denials of eligibility, termination of benefits or overpayments of public and private benefits. Program coordination, training, technical support and legal back-up for this service are provided by program staff through the Division of Disability and Elder Services, Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources, Office of Independence and Employment.

Authorizing Legislation

Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter HFS 10 addresses Family Care and includes a requirement that a resource center shall ensure that benefits counseling is one of the services available to its target population. (See HFS 10.23 (2)(d))

Outcomes

- During 2003, 836 individuals received Disability Benefit Specialist services: 588 new cases were opened, 248 cases were carried over from 2002, and 429 cases were closed.
- Of the 429 cases closed 2003, \$2,234,501 in benefits were obtained by consumers of the Disability Benefit Specialist services.
- Sixty-nine percent, or \$1,541,806 of the benefits obtained, were from federal funds.